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ABSTRACT

This paper utilizes the concepts of power and change as a framework for describing and analyzing efforts made by an individual teacher to change instructional-grouping and teacher-assignment practices in one Georgia school system. Data were collected through interviews with the individual teacher, administrators, educators, and federal and state officials; analysis of school board and study committee meetings; and analysis of an independent evaluation report. The teacher had received her master's degree in 1986 and obtained a teaching job at the high school. She noted inequalities in the school with regard to instructional-grouping practices and teacher assignments, particularly for African-Americans. Within 3 years, six changes occurred in the district as a result of her efforts: (1) assignment of teachers to advanced classes without regard to ethnic background; (2) the reassignment of the principal to a central-office position; (3) the creation of heterogeneously grouped classes at the elementary schools and more racially balanced classes at the high school; (4) the adoption of whole language programs and cooperative learning strategies; (5) some movement toward shared decision making; and (6) continuous study by outside evaluators of instructional and grouping changes. She articulated a personal vision, shared it with her colleagues, maintained persistent inquiry, mastered techniques for implementing change, stimulated other colleagues to improve their skills, and developed collaborative work cultures. Two barriers to change included the adoption of reform without appropriate teacher training and restructuring without creating a new school culture. The changes were tenacious because they were based on a moral purpose. Two figures are included. (LMI)

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# THE TEACHER'S ROLE IN RESTRUCTURING:

# THE POWER OF ONE

(A Case Study)

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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## THE TEACHER'S ROLE IN RESTRUCTURING:

## THE POWER OF ONE

(A Case Study)

### Introduction

Three years ago at the AERA conference in Chicago, we presented a study of African-American teachers in southeast Georgia. One of the case studies presented was the basis for further research into the teacher's role in restructuring. The original narrative from the 1991 paper is repeated below:

When Connie Parrish was a teenager, she knew that she wanted to do something special with her life. She wanted to go to college. Most of her friends in her small south Georgia town were not planning to go to college. They were either going to work, vocational school, or were already raising children. But Connie had worked hard to make good grades in her college prep classes and she was intent on achieving her goal. So in 1979, she enrolled in a small junior college near her hometown. She was one of only a handful of African-American students there. Public schools in Georgia had only recently achieved full implementation of court ordered desegregation plans and the private colleges (like this one) had just begun to receive and accept applications from African-Americans.

Connie graduated with an associate degree after two years and transferred to a large senior college. She continued to work hard and maintain a high GPA. On a hot June day in 1983, she received a BA in Biology, her favorite subject. By the time she obtained her degree, she was convinced that she wanted to spend her life making science as exciting for other young people as it had been for her. Connie was going to be a teacher!

Connie moved with her new husband to a community near a college where he worked in a local factory and she taught school while working toward certification. After obtaining her teaching certificate, she decided to continue her education and received a Masters degree in 1986. Connie and her husband moved once more when he received a better job offer in another community and she obtained a job at the local high school.
Connie was told by the administrator that usually new teachers in the school taught the lower levels. After each year, teachers could make requests for certain classes, grades, and levels. Connie observed that only ten of the 98 teachers in the school were African-American. This was in a system where 40% of the students were black. She also observed that the African-American teachers taught lower level classes. Connie was very dedicated and strived to motivate the young people in her classes which were largely made up of black students. The students responded well to her but were far behind in the skills needed to read their textbooks. Most of them had been tracked into the low level by the system when they were in the first grade and had remained there. Although they seemed to like and respect her, they were disinterested in learning about science. In fact, they did not seem to be interested

in anything to do with school. Most of them said they were just waiting to drop out. This was very discouraging for Connie. At the end of the year, Connie requested that she be given some upper level classes with the lower classes. This request was not honored. However, at the end of the next year, she was more persistent. She was told that she may be given some upper level classes but would not be given any "Advanced" classes. After further investigation, Connie realized that there were students in this system assigned to the Advanced level who could go all the way through school without ever having an African-American teacher.

The following year a new young white teacher was hired in the school. She was inexperienced and asked Connie for assistance. Connie provided her with help in planning, and gave her materials. The young lady was most appreciative of the help received throughout the year. At the beginning of the next year the young teacher was told that she would be assigned to teach the advanced biology classes. She objected and said that she did not feel ready to do this. However, she was told by the administrator that since the teacher that taught these classes the previous year was gone, she had no choice. Of course, Connie was very discouraged. When she asked the principal about her request to teach these classes, he told her it had been misplaced and he forgot about it. Another year, he told her that since she was pregnant, the advanced class would be too stressful for her. Finally, he admitted that there were some students whose parents would not want them to have a black teacher. "If you don't like it, then maybe you don't belong here." This comment was made to her at 8:30 one morning. Connie wanted to walk out. But she had students waiting for her. She went back to her classroom.

Because Connie dared to question this practice and the system's practice of tracking children in the first grade, she felt that remarks were made to her by the principal to humiliate her. Some of the faculty began to treat her differently also. "How dare she attempt to move into an area where she obviously wasn't wanted!" Her three year old was denied admittance to the school's preschool program. She was told that it was because she didn't sign him up when he was born. However, the new white coach got his child into the class his first year at the school.

Connie wanted to quit. But she loved to teach and she needed the money. She wanted to initiate a law suit. But legal fees were outrageously high. She wanted to cry. And she did.

This was the end of our 1991 study of Connie Parrish. Thankfully, however, this was not the end of the story. The subsequent actions taken by Connie and others, and the resulting changes in the Bulloch County School System and other systems in southeast Georgia are the foci of this paper.

**Perspective / Theoretical Framework**

Two concepts were prevalent in forming the basic perspectives for this study: power and change. These concepts are explored as they relate to teachers and reform.

Reed (1992) explores teacher power in her research on school site policy:

> Interestingly, teacher's are often characterized in (the) literature as being, or perceiving themselves as being, powerless. . . . They are referred to as the people at the bottom of a hierarchal bureaucratic structure, the implementers of programs and receivers of knowledge generated elsewhere and indeed, they are. However, that is not the same as being powerless. (pp. 3-4)

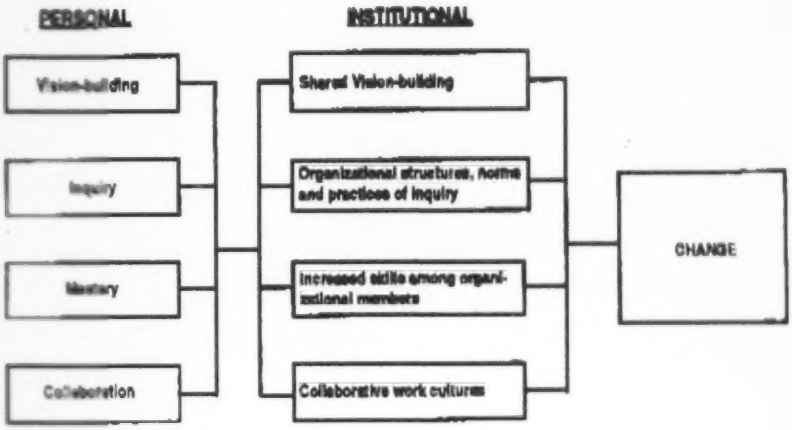
Maeroff (1988) provides his perceptions of teacher power in his book *The Empowerment of Teachers: Overcoming the Crisis of Confidence*.

> The levers of power, the switches that are turned on and off to make a school system run, are seldom in the hands of teachers. Sometimes it seems that even the building custodian has more authority than the teachers. (p. 76)

This negative view of teacher power is countered, however, by these authors and others. Reed (1992) argues that teachers can provide considerable influence when opportunities are provided. "Teachers kept in a narrow space will respond with a narrow response" (p. 27). When power and influence are rendered by teachers, however, it usually occurs in less bureaucratic terms. "The real power of teachers is not in their formal authority. The real power of teachers is in their informal power as leaders who contribute to the dynamics of adjustment and change in schools" (Stodl, 1992, p. 6). These informal leaders identify points of conflict and can therefore assume many effective leadership roles: negotiating with authority figures, articulating causes, motivating others to join in, and heightening awareness of issues involving trust, roles and identity (Burns, 1978; Stodl, 1992). The strong implication is that this teacher power leads to change. And that leads us

to Michael Fullan.

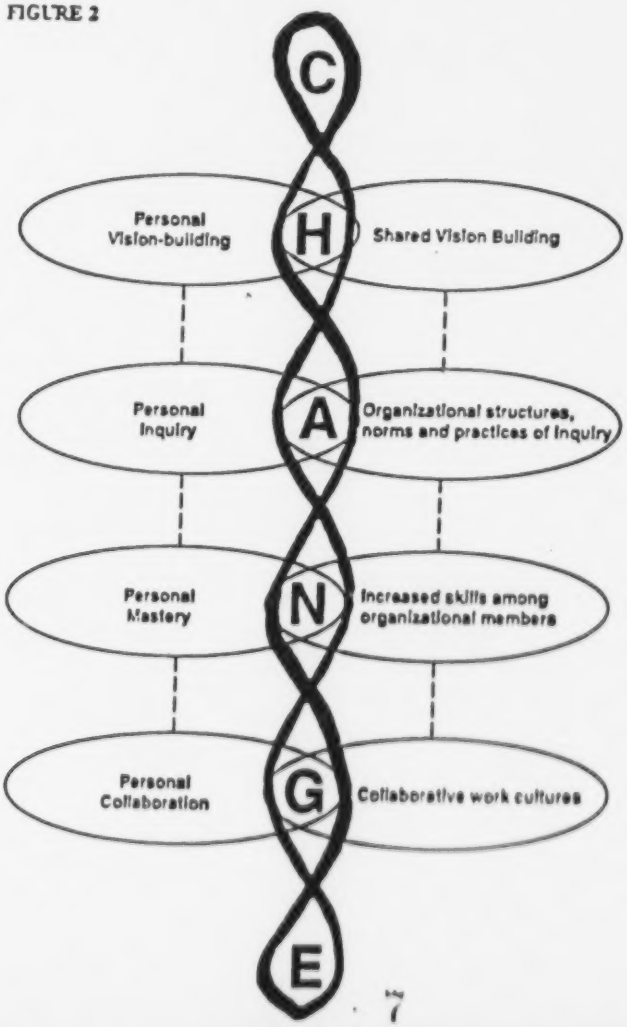
After reading Michael Fullan's article, "Why Teachers Must Become Change Agents" (1993b), the authors formulated a framework for change based on the core capacities he described. The framework below was included in the proposal submitted to AERA.




However, after hearing Fullan express his views and reading his book, *Change Forces: Probing the Depths of Educational Reform (1993a)*, we realized that our framework missed the mark. As Fullan himself has indicated, "when you go deeper, you go different" (p. vii). The major flaw with our framework was forcing the concepts into a linear paradigm. As we consumed the research and ideas presented by Fullan and others he recommended (Pascale, 1990; Senge, 1990; & Stacey, 1992), and as we related the ideas to our own experiences with change and those of our research subjects, we became convinced that change is, indeed, non-linear. Productive change is, instead, the constant "search for understanding, knowing there is not ultimate answer" (Stacey, 1992. p. 282). Senge (1990) indicates that the real

leverage for change involves: "seeing interrelationships rather than linear cause-effect chains, and seeing processes of change rather than snapshots" (p. 73). The emerging view of change occurs when "the sub-conscious is subtly retrained to structure data in circles instead of lines. . . . When this happens,. . . we become 'looped for life'"(Senge, 1990, p. 366). The new framework that we have formulated includes Fullan's concepts of personal vision building, inquiry, mastery, and collaboration as they intersect and overlap with their institutional counterparts. Flowing through this intersection (not resulting from it) is the process of change.

FIGURE 2



Fullan (1993a) presents insightful arguments for teachers becoming primary change agents. He indicates that each and every teacher has the responsibility to "help create an organization capable of individual and collective inquiry and continuous renewal, or it will not happen" (p. 39).

> Formal leaders of today's society are generated by a system that is operating under the old paradigm. Therefore, they are unlikely to have the conceptions and instincts necessary to bring about radical changes consistent with the new mindset we have been describing. . . . It is only by individuals taking action to alter their own environments that there is any chance for deep change. The "system" will not, indeed cannot, do us any favours. If anything, the educational system is killing itself because it is more designed for the same *status quo* while facing societal expectations of major reform. If teachers and other educators want to make a difference, and this is what drives the best of them, moral purpose is not good enough. Moral purpose needs an engine, and that engine is individual, skilled change agents pushing for changes around them, intersecting with other like minded individuals and groups to form the critical mass necessary to bring about continuous improvements. (Fullan, 1993a, p. 39-40)

In this case study the authors utilize the concepts related to power and change that are presented by Fullan and other experts as represented in the redesigned model. This framework is used as a basis for describing and analyzing efforts made by an individual teacher as she attempted to facilitate a change in long established methods of grouping and instruction of students and in the assignment of teachers. The actions of other educators, governmental units, and community members are also analyzed in relationship to the framework.

**Data Sources**

Multiple data sources were used. They included, but were not limited to, the following:

1. In-depth interviews with the individual teacher of focus.

2. Interviews with other educators and administrators in the school system.
3. Interviews with federal and state officials related to issues in employment and instructional grouping.
4. Minutes of Board meetings and meetings of study committees.
5. Audio and video tapes available of Board meetings in which issues raised by the teacher of focus were discussed.
6. Evaluation data provided to the School System by an independent research group.

## Methods and Techniques

The methods and techniques used in this case study can be described as ethnographic and qualitative. The researchers utilized data from the sources specified in the previous section to identify perspectives and actions of individuals and groups as changes were proposed, recommended, and implemented in one Georgia school system. The primary focus of the study is one individual teacher who facilitated much of the change through her words and actions. The influence of her words and actions on the words and actions of like-minded individuals as well as opponents were studied. Data gathered were analyzed in terms of the relationship to the framework identified in the introduction.

## Findings and the Analysis of Findings

## (a.k.a. The Rest of the Story)

"Restructuring efforts typically grow out of a dissatisfaction with existing conditions and a frustration with the existing organization" (National LEADership Network, 1991, p. 15). For Connie Parrish dissatisfaction and frustration were reaching new heights during the

school years described in the introduction. As Connie struggled with her own feeling of rejection related to her teaching assignment, she identified strongly with students who were rejected by the system.

> I have felt the rejection that these students in low levels are feeling each and every day. I requested the higher level classes several times. I was passed over several times. I watched as white teachers new and old entered the system and were selected over me. I was told that the white community may not accept me. I guess they won't because I don't *look* like an upper level student. (Remarks at October 8, 1991 School Board meeting)

Connie had always had a since of moral purpose in education. ["Scratch a good teacher and you will find a moral purpose" (Fullan, 1993a, p. 10)]. She began teaching because she wanted to make science exciting for other young people and make a difference in their lives. And she did try to make a difference in her classroom. However, her struggle with her own feelings as they reflected the rejection of the students led her to ***personal vision building***. She began to develop a vision which allowed all children to develop to their fullest potential (without the restrictions of tracking) and which assigned teachers to the positions that were rewarding and challenging regardless of their race or ethnic background. Block (1987) indicates that "creating a vision forces us to take a stand for a preferred future" (p. 102). When we articulate our vision of the future, it forces us to "come out of the closet with out doubts about the organization and the way it operates" (p. 105). As Connie began to articulate her vision, she faced additional rejection by some. However, she also found that there were many who felt the same way. Her personal vision began to intersect with the ***shared visions*** of her colleagues. According to Connie, knowing that she had support from some of her colleagues, from Georgia Southern University faculty, and from other educators

around the state provided her with strength to continue to articulate this vision (personal communication, November, 1992).

***Inquiry*** was an important component in Connie's journey. She not only questioned and learned in the process of forming a vision for the future, she aggressively sought answers to problems through her own research. The legal dead ends she initially described were not permanent barriers. Connie simply used these markers to determine future possibilities. The Georgia Association of Educators (GAE) did not feel that Connie's case was one in which they could make a difference. However, one GAE lawyer that shared Connie's vision discussed the problems in Bulloch County with an official of the Office of Civil Rights (OCR). This led Connie to a contact which could make a meaningful difference. Connie's inquiry into Civil Rights laws and court decisions related to Bulloch County provided knowledge that would prove to be beneficial as she maintained her quest for equity and excellence. Her personal inquiry overlapped with ***organizational inquiry*** conducted simultaneously with researchers at Georgia Southern University, the Georgia Association of Educators, and the Office of Civil Rights (personal communication, December, 1992). According to an official with the OCR, their initial decision to investigate was related to Connie's not receiving Advanced Placement (AP) courses to teach. However, as their inquiry continued, they discovered vast problems within the system. (personal communication, January 1992).

Connie's ***personal mastery*** of competence and skills provided the necessary components for stimulating change.

When personal mastery goes becomes a discipline -- an activity we integrate into our

> lives -- it embodies two underlying movements. The first is continually clarifying what is important to us (purpose and vision). We often spend too much time coping with problems along our path that we forget why we are on that path in the first place. The result is that we only have a dim, or even inaccurate, view of what's really important to us. The second is continually learning how to see current reality more clearly. . . The juxtaposition of vision (what we want) and a clear picture of current reality (where we are relative to what we want) generates what we call "creative tension". "Learning" in this context does not mean acquiring more information, but expanding the ability to produce results we truly want in life. (Senge, 1990, p. 142)

Connie's personal mastery of competence and skills was evidenced in a stirring speech provided to a group of over 500 citizens at a school board meeting held on October 8, 1991. The board members had earlier moved to begin untracking in the primary grades and were met my extensive opposition from elitist parents. (See Page & Page, 1993.) These parents had organized and hired lawyers to present their case that homogenous grouping should be maintained in the system. Indeed, these opponents of heterogenous grouping had developed personal mastery themselves in developing and articulating their views. Connie's willingness to speak openly at

this time stimulated others to organize and prepare themselves for a similar purpose. An excerpt from Connie's remarks that night provide a view of her passion for change.

> No matter how you slice it, people, grouping is wrong. We've had twenty years of grouping and we're more segregated now than ever before. How many of you have walked in a classroom at Statesboro High School? That's where you will see the real results of grouping. Most of these students were tracked long before they reached high school. They were tracked from the eighth day of kindergarten. That's when the teacher decided who would be successful and who would not, from the eighth day of kindergarten. You say grouping is good because it has always been done or has been done for twenty years. Well let me tell you, slavery was practiced for three hundred years. It was no more right the last day than it was the first day!

Connie's personal mastery presented a paradox of success and failure. This dilemma is

illustrated by Senge (1990):

> People with a high level of personal mastery live in a continual learning mode . . . personal mastery is not something you possess. It is a process. It is a lifelong discipline. People with a high level of personal mastery are acutely aware of their ignorance, their incompetence, their growth areas. And they are deeply self-confident. Paradoxical? Only for those who do not see that "the journey is the reward". (p. 142)

Connie's personal mastery stimulated and intersected with a increased mastery of a loose informal organization forming to stimulate change in the school system. ***Increased skills among organizational members*** were important factors in the development of strategies for change. Teachers within the system began to seek and incorporate techniques for meeting the needs of all students. For example, a group of teachers at one of the primary schools formed an organization to promote better grouping strategies and to practice instructional methods which promote learning in a diverse classroom. In addition to working among themselves to learn and grow, they joined Connie in becoming advocates in the community for change. An excerpt from a report provided to the school system central office staff by this group of teachers illustrates their commitment.

> As we begin a new school year we tend to reflect over the past year with mixed emotions -- and begin this year with deep concern about those students who are at risk and about the path they are taking throughout our Bulloch County school system. It is with extreme frustration and concern that we now address this issue. Frustration, because we know next year the same educational situation awaits us with the same set of problems: students who have special behavior and/or learning problems grouped together, feeding on each other's lowered self concepts and inappropriate behaviors. This type of situation creates frustration -- not only for the teacher -- but also for the students. . . . Are we casting "at-risk" students aside at the very beginning of their school careers because we think they are doomed to failure anyway? (Committee of Concerned Educators Against Homogeneous Grouping at Sallie Zetterower Primary School, 1990, p. 1)

Members of the central office staff that shared Connie's vision also became more skilled at

researching and presenting ideas to decision-making administrators. They concluded a research report presented to the central office administration and to the school board with the following statement:

> Finally, social consequences have often motivated such groups as the National Education Association and the National Governors Association to oppose ability grouping. . . . Perhaps more importantly the fact remains that this practice is, from an achievement standpoint, not justifiable. If one major goal of schooling is to enhance student achievement, placing them into classrooms based on ability groups will not accomplish it. (Classroom Assignment, 1991, p. 4).

These staff members also provided stimulation and encouragement, as well as some training, for teachers to make changes in their curriculum and methods which would better meet the needs of all students. (N. McNair, personal communication, March 23, 1993). These changes were not made without problems. The teachers and other educators attempting to stimulate and implement changes in grouping, curriculum, and methods all reported anxiety, stress, and uncertainty in

their attempts. However, they continued to encourage one another in these growth efforts. This paradox is discussed by Fullan (1993a).

> The more accustomed one becomes at dealing with the unknown, the more one understands that creative breakthroughs are always preceded by periods of cloudy thinking, confusion, exploration, trial and stress; followed by periods of excitement, and growing confidence as one pursues purposeful change, or copes with unwanted change. (p. 17)

Although teachers possess some individual power, especially in their own classrooms, ***collaboration*** is essential if systemic change is to take place. Connie realized this from the onset of her quest and sought collaborations with others. She moved beyond the walls of her school in developing relationships with university faculty, legal experts, and governmental

units. This effort was essential according to Fullan (1993a):

> There is a ceiling effect to how much we can learn if we keep to ourselves. The ability to collaborate -- on both a small and large scale -- is becoming one of the core requisites of postmodern society. . . . People need one another to learn and to accomplish things. (p. 17)

***Collaborative work cultures*** that developed in Bulloch County provided opportunities for personal and organizational growth. Some of these collaborative work cultures were formal committees formed by the board of education to deal with the grouping dilemma. One of these groups included parents and provided an opportunity for them to provide input and grow in the process as well. Voices that had not been heard before became evident. Willie Jones assumed a leadership role among parents of African-American children by listening to them in church meetings and other places and then expressing their concerns at the committee of parents formed by the school board. The following comments were provided by Jones in response to a report previously delivered to a study committee by a group of teachers and administrators against making changes:

> The subcommittee report that was provided by Julia P. Bryant administrators and some teachers emphasizes the need for teachers to be "sold on what they are doing" to be effective. This would certainly be wonderful. However, we wonder if some changes in our nation would have *ever* taken place if we waited till all individuals involved were in agreement. Should we have waited for slave owners to agree to do away with slavery? Should the courts have waited for educators in the South to agree to do away with segregation? Should we wait for all teachers in the system to agree with the board before we take progressive steps to serve *all* of the children in our county with a quality education? I'm afraid that we may be waiting for another 20 years. Sometimes individuals must move ahead before they think they are ready. Perhaps after these teachers have taught mixed groups for a few years, they will have the same enthusiasm for working with all children as others throughout the county do now. My wife and I are very thankful that our child is attending a school that is not tracked [Marvin Pittman Laboratory School]. However, we must look beyond our own children if we want the best for our community. We encourage the board to carry out their original decision to abolish tracking in the elementary schools.

Although the collaborative work cultures were actually begun with people in traditional "non-power" positions, the decision-making forces joined the efforts when the balance of research, evidence of ethical reasons and legal factors leaned in the direction of Connie and like-minded individuals. A board member reflected on their decision making process:

> The initial decision [to move to heterogenous grouping] was based on recommendations from the central office. I believe they were responding to the teachers. They also were more aware of the seriousness of the OCR investigation than we probably were. After the controversy [backlash from elitist parents] arose though, board members were concerned about the decision and the central office had Ishmael Childs [liaison person between the Georgia Department of Education and the Office of Civil Rights] come talk to us . . . . After that, we knew we had to make the change. The decision was how to change it so that it was acceptable to the community and to the OCR. We also knew that we had to look at possible compromises. . . . We were hoping that we could get the jump. We were hoping that we could get the changes made before the Office of Civil Rights took further action. (J. Taulbee, personal communication, April 5, 1992)

The ***changes*** that have taken place related to Connie Parrish's initial efforts are numerous and complex. Six of these changes are identified include:

1. Assignment of teachers to AP classes without regard to ethnic background. (Connie now teaches one AP class each year.)
2. The reassignment of the principal at Connie's high school to an administrative position in the central office which is more in line with his management skills.
3. Heterogeneously grouped classes at the elementary schools and more racially balanced classes at the high school.
4. Curriculum innovations such as the adoption of whole language programs and cooperative learning strategies.

5. Some movement toward restructuring efforts to increase shared decision-making.

6. Continuous study by outside evaluators of effects of instructional and grouping changes.

The changes in Bulloch County stimulated others with like-minded visions in surrounding counties to take individual and collaborative risks. Two other counties in the area have recently moved to heterogenous grouping and are adopting curriculum and instructional plans for improving learning by all students.

***Problems*** have also been numerous and complex. A major problem seemed to be the adoption of changes or programs without appropriate training provided to those that would implement the changes (i.e. teachers). It also became apparent that the schools had been somewhat restructured without being recultured. Many teachers initially held firm to the old norms regarding intellect and learning. Additionally, there were a small number of influential parents who pulled their children out of the public schools and placed them in an all-white private school in the county. Some of these parents had been very involved in supporting the schools through parent teacher organizations, money raising programs, etc. (However, other parents seemed to have taken over their leadership positions in these areas.) Fullan (1993a) acknowledges that problems are an inherent part of change but also argues that "problems are our friends."

> It seems perverse to say that problems are our friends, but we cannot develop effective responses to complex situations unless we actively seek and confront the real problems which are in fact difficult to solve. Problems are our friends because it is only through immersing ourselves in problems that we can come up with creative solutions. Problems are the route to deeper change and deeper satisfaction. In this

sense effective organizations "embrace problems" rather than avoid them. (p. 26)

***Success***, though, has also been evident. A report by provided to the board by an independent research agency indicated that factors such as student achievement, self-concept, discipline problems, and teachers' attitudes had all generally been much improved with the changes that have taken place. (Center for Rural Health and Research, 1993).

Connie reports that the grouping changes have produced positive results but there have been some setbacks in other areas. The new administration that came in after her initial principal was reassigned seemed to promote fairness and encouraged faculty and student growth. However, he did not cater to "power" groups and his contract (for some reason) wasn't renewed. The next and current principal seems to cater to some groups of teachers and students. Because of this, old cliques that had been prevalent in the past are reforming. Connie attributes some of the concerns related to the new administration with his inexperience at her school. She has hopes that she and others can work with him in continuing the efforts for productive change that began earlier. Connie indicates that she would certainly "do it all over again." The reason: "The kids have to know that somebody cares!" (personal communication, March 15, 1994).

**Educational Importance**

The events that occurred in Bulloch County, Georgia indicate that one person can make a difference. This was done by articulating a vision, persistent inquiry, mastering techniques for implementing change, and collaborating with others seeking improvement in the schools. Additionally, efforts by Connie and others were tenacious because the changes they sought had a moral purpose. According to Fullan (1993b), "moral purpose without

change agentry is martyrdom; change agentry without moral purpose is change for the sake of change. In combination, not only are they effective in getting things done, but they are good at getting the *right* things done" (p. 14). This case study is indicative of the efforts that can be made from those who were deemed as powerless in the past. Leaders in restructuring efforts may be in positions that are not traditionally seen as leadership positions. Risk taking is imperative for some changes to occur. The results, however, can be organizational structures that support risk taking and innovation.

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